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Theme 3: Philosophy, art, and ethics

Luck and Virtues in the *Xunzi*

This paper investigates the conception of luck in the *Xunzi*. In particular the paper explores how luck is related to the cultivation of virtues. While there is no exact equivalence of the concept of luck in the *Xunzi*, the frequent employment of concepts such as *xing* (幸), *ming* (命), *jie* (節), and *yu* (遇) shows that Xunzi has an acute awareness of life's vicissitudes. What is Xunzi's advice on accommodating life's fortunes and misfortunes? Unsurprisingly Xunzi suggests that the noble man concentrates on the cultivation of virtues irrespective of circumstances. Yet in what sense virtues help one to face the destiny of life? Do virtues make one invulnerable to life's accidentality? Or maybe human lives are fragile as ever, but the cultivation of virtues points to a part of life that is truly under one's own control. This paper suggests that Xunzi follows the Confucian distinction between destiny (*ming* 命) and righteousness (*yi* 義) and carries it to a logical conclusion, which is a distinction between nature (*xing* 性) and artifice (*wei* 偽). Interpreted in this light, the distinction between nature and artifice might be seen as a distinction between the realm of human agency and the realm of luck, the latter being nonetheless amenable to human contrivance to a certain extent.

Keywords: luck, virtue, Xunzi, Confucianism, destiny